

#1
Chase, J. Russell
interviewed by Vivian and Ralph Andrist
on January 29, 1986, Eastham, MA

Eastham Historical Society-Oral Histories

1 audiocassette (ca. 90 min.) + transcript

Eastham (MA) Houses--Identification

Keith, Florence

Eastham (MA) 1920's-1940's

52
367

Interview with Russell Chase
in Eastham, Massachusetts

Interview #1
by Vivian and
Ralph Andrist
January 29, 1986

Q: This is an interview with Russell Chase in his home on Salt Pond Road in Eastham, Massachusetts. It is part of the oral history project of the Eastham Historical Society.

Okay, Mr. Chase, let's start with when and where you were born.

Russell Chase: I was born in Eastham, March 9, 1922.

Q: In this house?

Russell Chase: Not in this house, no. I was born in the home of the local midwife.

Q: And where was that?

Russell Chase: In South Eastham.

Q: Can you tell me about where it was?

Russell Chase: It was right near the cemetery on Route 6.

Q: And what was her name?

RC: Her name was Netty Knowles.

Q: Did everybody use her usually in that period?

RC: Yes, because this was before Cape Cod Hospital. Cape Cod Hospital was founded in the period when I was about five years old. I was a patient there at five.

Q: Now let's talk about your father's family. What was his name and where did he come from? His background.

RC: My father's name was Leslie Emerson Chase, the son of Charles Whitman Chase. My grandfather lived in many places with my grandmother, Harriet Gill Chase. I do not remember her. She died in childbirth and my grandfather married again. So I remember my step-grandmother. They lived in North Eastham when I knew them. My father was Town Clerk, Treasurer, and Tax Collectore of Eastham for a long period of time. He ran two other jobs besides.

Q: A true Caper!

RC: Yes. He had an asparagus business and also a trucking concern.

Q: Wasn't there a Chase farm down Samoset Road?

RC: That was his, yes.

Q: Were you living down on that farm on Samoset when you were a little boy?

RC: No. There was never a house on there belonging to us.

There was a farm shack where they bunched asparagus, but there was no house. But he did live in that vicinity when he was a small child. In the big square house on the corner. It belongs to, I believe, a Hatch family.

Q: The big yellow one?

RC: White.

Q: White. I see. I'm trying to place it.

Your mother's family, was she Eastham people too?

RC: No, she came from East Boston and Cambridge. She came down to visit my grandfather's sister, who lived on Locust Road, and my father's grandmother lived across the street. So they met as next door neighbors.

Q: And romance budded?

RC: Yes, that's right.

Q: Do you know when they were married, the date?

RC: No, I don't. It was before-- approximately 1912, something like that. Because there were two children that were born that died before I was born.

Q: Are you the oldest?

RC: I'm the oldest of the living children, yes.

Q: And the others? We won't go into detail on them, but just

their names for the time being.

RC: Charles W. Chase and Maude W. Wilkinson. My sister was a schoolteacher and my brother has run and does run the Capistrano Bicycle Shop.

Q: Do you have any remembrances of your grandfather Chase and his wife? Any little anecdotes you can tell about?

RC: Oh, yes. But I knew my other grandparents [the Cobbs] much better.

Q: All right. We'll cover both of them.

RC: My grandmother Chase-- not my step-grandmother, but my true grandmother-- was a very talented musician, and she went over Cape Cod with a piano or a reed organ in the back of a horse and wagon. She played for dances. I believe that at one time she was organist at the Chapel in the Pines.

Q: Is she the one who inspired you?

RC: I never saw the woman, but I think I have inherited her talent. According to comments from people who knew her and listened to me, they thought they could detect her in my playing. My step-grandmother was a wonderful cook. My step-cousin lived with them, and I remember going into the pantry and taking a loaf of cake and cutting it in half, taking the piece in the middle and putting the two together, so she would never know the difference. That I remember. And the bread, the homemade bread. She was very

fond of the house. I remember her saying one day that she hoped that she could spend the rest of her life and die in that house. That's the way it worked out.

Q: Which house is this?

RC: This is Ralph Chase's house at the end of Schoolhouse Road. She was a person with tremendous guts. I remember her taking a broom, strapping a paintbrush onto the broom handle and painting the kitchen floor from her wheelchair. I was very fond of her. I wish I had spent more time with those grandparents, but I spent my time with these grandparents.

Q: And what were their names?

RC: Their names were Cobb. They were the descendants of the Cobbs that built this place. The builder was apparently Joseph Myrick Cobb and Jane Wixon Cobb. Joseph Myrick Cobb was my grandfather's father. And he was Joseph Abbott Cobb and married Eleanor Warren, who originally came from Nova Scotia.

Q: What do you remember about them?

RC: My grandfather lived here until his parents died. Then he moved to Boston, worked on T-Wharf.

Q: As a fisherman?

RC: He packed fish. I remember that there were stories that he worked with Geraldine Farrar's father, who also worked on on T-

Wharf. They used to compare notes on their daughters. Geraldine Farrar was a singer, as you know. My mother was an elocutionist. She taught elocution and dramatic art, then came to the Cape to live with her parents. My grandfather said when he was fifty he was coming back home, and he came back here and opened his house, which he called "Comfort Cottage". I have pictures here to show you.

Q: "Comfort House", didn't Lucy Hopkins talk about that?

RC: Perhaps Lucy Hopkins did, but it was officially "Comfort Cottage".

Q: And that's this house [on Salt Pond Road]?

RC: That's this house. That was my grandfather and grandmother who ran this place. They were called Uncle Joe and Aunt Nell by all their boarders.

(The following concerns the pictures being looked at)

Q: Isn't ^{he}~~she~~ cute.

RC: There's my grandfather and me. I'm on top of the stump.

Q: You've grown a little.

RC: Yes, about sixty years worth. We were able to see all of this from right down here, as you go out the driveway. This was all visible during the time of my memory. Now it's all wooded.

Q: Now which is the Bennison house?

RC: It's not there. You are in this house, in the last room down, looking out the front room windows. That's Mr. Merson's house. It was Abbott Knowles' house. This is where Esther Moore lived and her parents, Albert and Eva [Bert and Eva]. My grandfather's sister, Lucy Cobb Knowles, lived here, across the street from the Moores.

Q: And this would be Fred Jewell's, and the town pump was right in there.

RC: Here's a better picture of it, at a different time of the year.

Q: It hasn't changed much, except for more trees.

RC: Yes. There's ^{the} Pease [Dan and Haze Pease] house, that belonged to Captain Savage. I was with my grandfather raking the lawn the day that we watched him drop dead.

Q: Oh, really? What did he do, have a heart attack?

RC: Yes, I think so.

Q: These are beautiful pictures.

RC: I hope to write a book about it. This was Comfort Cottage at its height. It got called Comfort House and Comfort Cottage both. Some postal cards were named Comfort House and others Comfort Cottage, I believe.

Q: So this was run as a boarding house?

RC: A boarding house, yes. My grandfather also filled up the neighbors' spare rooms and the rooms in this house and the little cottage out there. And they all came here to eat as well.

Q: Can you give me dates on this? Was this in the twenties, the teens?

RC: Anywhere from 1908 to 1928 or '29.

Q: About twenty years?

RC: Yes.

Q: And the people came from outside?

RC: New York.

Q: New York, not Boston?

RC: A great many of those people were New York people. Some people came from the Boston area also.

Q: And they came down by train?

RC: Yes. And he went over to the depot to meet them at the train. A couple wanted to know if he'd meet them by boat!

Here are some of his people. Some of these people came here to live. I remember the dog. The dog's name was Beauty. And that was Carl French. I don't know who the other people were.

And this is different stages of the house. Here's the old Schoolhouse Museum. That used to be Schoolhouse Road coming down

Q: Certainly looks different now. [Discussing the Schoolhouse]
That's when it had the wings on it.

RC: That's right. I went to school in all three wings. Our's
was the last class to graduate from this school, 1936.

Q: We'll have to talk about that. It was certainly pretty,
prettier than now.

RC: Yes, that's right. It was much different. It was a very
isolated village. People were few and far between.

Q: And you all kind of knew each other?

RC: If we didn't live too far away. [LAUGHTER] If you wanted
to get some place in those days, you walked or rode a bicycle.
There was no "family taxi" to take the kids hither, thither and
yonder, as they have today.

Q: What did you do in the winter? Sadie [Sadie Flint] said that
you went by barge. Was that sort of like a school bus to school?

RC: I think that we did call them school barges in those days.
I never used one until high school [Orleans], because I lived
directly across the street. Travel was very slow. I can remember
stories of my grandfather and grandmother, told to me by my mother,
that they came down from Boston and it would take them three days
to get here. The first day they'd come to Plymouth-- my ^{gt.}grandmother
came from Dennis-- and the second day they would hit Dennis and
must have stayed with some of those relatives whose name was Wixon.

I don't know any of the Wixons. I have never met one of them. I must have cousins all over. I have many cousins. I'm related to the Doane family. I don't know any of them. [LAUGHTER] Maybe a couple of them somewhere along the line. Perhaps they are relatives and perhaps they are not of one of these families.

I could tell something about Dr. Bennison's house. That was lived in by two elderly women, the mother and the daughter, both confined to wheelchairs. I used to like to go over there, because I didn't know any other people that lived in wheelchairs. They used to get my grandfather to move the kitchen stove for them. This was twice a year. Etta would point with her cane-- "Over there, Joe, a half an inch. No, no, Joe, a half an inch back over there." I remember he'd be coming home, swearing all the way.

I heard my first radio program at their house. I remember the tubes on that radio to this day, WHD 11. An ABC battery radio with two pairs of earphones. So they used to let me listen. The program I heard was either John Philip Souza or Arthur Pryor's band. My first radio program, the first music broadcast I ever heard.

Q: What were their names?

RC: Perry. Mr. Perry had died. In one of these pictures is the Perry barn, which I never saw.

Q: It's since been torn down?

RC: Yes. There it is. I never saw it.

Q: You were too little?

RC: Yes, if it was there at all. This may be preceding that date.

Q: This is Main Street?

RC: That was the main road out here. That was Old King's Highway at that time. It says Main Street, South Eastham, on this card.

Q: Let's talk a little bit more about your grandfather. What do you remember about him? What kind of person was he?

RC: Winding that clock. [LAUGHTER] I remember him trying to make a piece of wire and put it in the clock, trying to wind it up. I realized he had no mechanical knowledge whatsoever. I was seven.

Q: What kind of man was he? Stern? Kind?

RC: That depends on whom you talk to. He was very kind to me. I remember him as a very kind, very loving grandparent.

Q: This was Mr. Cobb, right?

RC: Cobb, yes. I've heard stories in the village he used to chase some of the boys around with a pitchfork. Maybe he did, maybe he didn't.

Q: Probably with good reason.

RC: Probably.

Q: What kind of person was your grandmother, your Grandmother

RC: Most of the time when I knew her she was an invalid, confined to bed. She was a very talented person when it came to decorating cakes and so forth. She used to make things out of cornstarch and confectioner's sugar and decorated cakes with them. She was a very near-sighted person. She dropped out of school in about fourth or fifth grade, because people didn't understand her need for glasses.

My grandmother had several sisters. They all died diabetics. They were ^{apparently} some of the original patients at the Joslin Clinic. They were all amateur musicians. But it was very frowned upon to become a singer in those days. Everyone headed for the stage was considered a potential prostitute. So that didn't go in any direction. I remember her playing by ear.

Q: The piano?

RC: She played the piano by ear and the other sisters were said to have sung. I never heard any of them do that. But there were stories of getting together for Christmas parties and that sort of thing.

Q: How about your own parents? What kind of man was your father?

RC: A very conscientious man.

Q: What did he do?

RC: Town Clerk, Treasurer, and Tax Collector, plus running a farm and a trucking business. A very busy man. I didn't see too much of him, because he had five businesses. My mother had

been an elocutionist. She was still practicing when I remember her as a small child.

Q: Did she give lessons here on the Cape?

RC: Not in general. She taught in Boston before she came here, but she did do some coaching of high school plays. She did entertainments at the Methodist Church and the Universalist Church [the Chapel].

Q: Did the Methodist Church and religion play a big part in your life in growing up? In your parents' lives?

RC: Off and on, when they had time. My grandfather was involved in the Methodist Church and the Unitarian Church, which was Universalist then. He supported both of them. He was involved in making chicken pies, that sort of thing.

Q: What was Christmas like here on the Cape when you were a little boy?

RC: Well, my grandparents came to my parents' house, which was located roughly where the National Seashore Park sign is. In that vicinity, across from the restaurant. My uncle, Ralph Chase, spent every Christmas with us. Mr. and Mrs. Atwood did also. They used to live in the house right on the corner of Locust Road and Route 6. It's now the cottage colony, painted yellow. They were a couple of my grandfather's boarders, who had come to live here afterwards. So they spent their Christmas with us. I remember my job was to play the piano and keep them out of the

Q: How old were you when you were playing?

RC: This went on to 1940. I was in my early teens.

Q: Did you have a Christmas tree and all that sort of thing?

RC: Yes, we had a Christmas tree in the house where I used to live. We had one that was six feet tall. Very high ceilings. Here, after we moved back to this house after my grandparents died, we always had a Christmas tree. Either a cedar tree, or once in a while we had a pine tree.

Q: Did you cut your own?

RC: Yes, we always cut our own Christmas trees. At that time we didn't have to steal any of them. We just went out and cut them.

Q: Did you celebrate Thanksgiving too?

RC: Yes, we celebrated Thanksgiving, but we came here to my grandparent's. They were still living, until I was eight.

Q: So you lived in a house right over by where the sign is. It has obviously been torn down. Or has it been moved somewhere?

RC: No, it was moved. It's up near the schoolhouse, the road to the side of the Eastham Elementary School, the dirt road that goes down toward the pond. Later it belonged to Ed ~~the~~ ^{Ed} and Vito Trautz for a while. Then they sold it to somebody else, I'm not sure who.

Q: It seems to be a pattern in Eastham, or maybe on the whole Cape, I don't know-- instead of tearing down houses, people bought them and moved them. Pretty much of a pattern. Did you find that to be true?

RC: I think that you are more aware of that than I would be, having moved in from outside, tracing the history.

Q: Yes, right, I suppose so. Let's talk about the neighborhood here. Who was the captain who lived in the Pease house?

RC: Captain Savage.

Q: Captain Savage. And what do you remember about him?

RC: Only the day when he fell down with the heart attack. That is my memory. I was very young.

Q: What was he captain of? Navy?

RC: I don't know whether that was captain by courtesy or captain of-- we had a lot of people that were captain by courtesy.

Q: I see. Then you had Harvey Moore. He lived up in the back of the Savage house.

RC: Yes, I knew him well.

Q: Did you? What can you tell us about him?

RC: Well, he and my father always took collection at the church, at the Chapel in the Pines. I was organist there for seventeen

summers and three years, full years. So I had twenty years with that background. The man who reopened the church was Dr. Robert Weston. He lived next door. I'm still in touch with him.

Q: You say he reopened the church. Was it closed?

RC: It was closed for a while between 1930-- the last time I remember going there was my grandmother's funeral in 1930. It was reopened for summer church in-- I think it was 1936 approximately, about that time. Then it ran for summer church until Dr. Weston, who had not received his doctorate at that point-- he was minister and came and gave some very outstanding sermons, outspoken, and the sermon that made him famous was "I Saw Hiroshima Dead".

Q: Was it pretty much the same as it is now, the chapel?

RC: Physically, yes.

Q: Those double doors in between and everything?

RC: Yes. They had a couple of stoves to heat with instead of a heating system, and it did not have a bathroom. It had "outdoor plumbing." The key used to hang on the hook by the sink.

Q: Did you have pews or moveable chairs?

RC: Just the same as it is now, moveable chairs.

Q: And the kitchen?

RC: The kitchen was there, yes. They had an old coal stove. I

can remember Harvey's wife, Sarah-- we called her Sadie and she was always active at church suppers washing dishes. She was the cook at my grandfather's.

Q: At the "Comfort Cottage"? [Friends of today claim both names sound like the names of whorehouses, so I prefer "Comfort Cottage" be used]

RC: Yes.

Q: There are a lot of Moores around here. I don't know whether Harvey was related to Maurice or not. Were they cousins or something?

RC: Yes. They were all related.

Q: We interviewed Maurice and Katherine before he died. Fascinating stories of his trip to sea and so forth. We missed out on Esther, because she died before we could get to her. What kind of person was she?

RC: A very gregarious person. A schoolteacher. Taught in New Jersey, then came back and taught as a substitute in Eastham at the school she originally attended. She had the largest funeral for any person in her elderly years I have ever attended.

Q: This was out of the Methodist Church?

RC: Yes. Eastham Methodist Church.

Q: Do you remember the night the Methodist Church burned down

or were you too young?

RC: I was too young. That was before my birth, I believe, or during my very earliest years.

Q: Let's get on to your Uncle Ralph. We have an obituary of him here that ran in the Cape Codder, and he seems to have done everything in town.

RC: Yes, that's correct.

Q: Is he a brother of your father?

RC: Yes.

Q: They were not evidently in the Town Hall at the same time. Was he Town Clerk too?

RC: No, he was a Selectman.

Q: Well, maybe they could have been.

RC: Yes, I think they were. He was the son of Charles W. and Harriet Gill Chase. Let's see, the Town Hall in those days was managed by the three Selectmen: Ed Penniman, son of Captain Edward Penniman of the Penniman house, and Leslie Chase, Town Clerk, and Arthur Parnell and either George Howard or Maurice Wiley. Jennie B. Sparrow, Don's mother, also worked in the Town office.

Q: What do you remember about your Uncle Ralph?

RC: A farmer, he had a lot of hens, henhouses.

Q: And he lived always in the old homestead then?

RC: Yes, when I remember him. But I guess they were a family that lived in many places.

Q: He was married rather late, wasn't he?

RC: Yes. He was eighty when he got married.

Q: He had to think it over for a while!

RC: Yes.

[LAUGHTER]

Q: He wasn't going to be pushed into anything.

RC: No. It would seem that way.

Q: Was it quite a surprise to the family when he brought this little Japanese girl home?

RC: Yes. It surprised some of the townspeople more than it surprised us.

Q: Did it? She seems to have settled in very nicely. Just a very nice person.

RC: Yes, she is.

Q: There is a daughter mentioned in the obituary. Was that their daughter?

RC: No, she was married before. And her husband was killed as

a result of the bomb in Hiroshima. The radiation, I believe.

Q: I see. So she lived in Hiroshima?

RC: I can't tell you that, I don't know.

Q: You were too young to remember World War I, I imagine.

RC: I remember a lot of stories about it, but I was born in 1922 and that was in 1917.

Q: What kind of stories? Can you remember any?

RC: Yes, I remember one. The day the submarine came to Orleans. I had heard about that. I have a conversation between me and my mother about this.

Q: You mean a tape?

RC: Reel to reel.

Q: It can be copied onto a cassette, which probably it should be.

Can you remember what she said?

RC: Only that she heard a strange noise, and she had the thought-- she told some people that that was a German boat. There was a streak of the psychic which ran in the family. My grandfather Cobb predicted in early 1900 the very busy corner up there at the light and it all has become true, except trolley cars.

Q: He thought there would be trolley cars?

RC: Yes.

Q: I see. Well, the German submarine must have been quite an occasion here on the cape. What happened? Did it run aground?

RC: In Orleans. I can't tell you much about it. I try to be very careful what I'm saying, because it's so difficult if one weren't there and didn't see it and didn't hear it, to say such and such happened.

Q: Okay, I can go along with that. I think the next thing was in the twenties, Prohibition. We have many stories about the rum-runners on Cape Cod, who made a really good living.

RC: I think I will remain quiet. [LAUGHTER] Except I'll tell you that one of our neighbors, no longer living, his homemade brew blew up the cellar stairs.

Q: I think we all have gone through that. Because I can remember that too as a child, all of a sudden in the middle of the night you could hear the corks popping in the basement. Only it was a cellar, not a basement, at that period of time. Don Sparrow interviewed Bud Cummings and he talked about going out beyond the three-mile limit and being chased by the Coast Guard on the way back. A very interesting situation. And, of course, Art Nickerson talks about going down to the Bay and picking up the bottles that were jettisoned the night before. That sort of thing.

RC: No comment.

Q: Okay. [LAUGHTER] Now we come to the Depression. What effect did it have on the people around here?

RC: I was in school, in what is now the museum, and the only thing that I was aware of was certain children came to school in dungarees. Our teacher, who was Otto Nickerson-- probably one of the most brilliant teachers I have ever known, ever met-- handled it so carefully that we weren't aware that we were in a Depression. There was no "You're poor," or something or another. This was all kept very quiet.

Q: People always had enough to eat though?

RC: I did, because my father had a Town job and he didn't lose his job. I think maybe some of the other people that I grew up with that I didn't know about didn't. Cape Codders were very proud people. They didn't want anyone to know that they didn't have money or they didn't have this or that. I imagine some of the rest of them didn't fare so well. I was never hungry and I never, never lacked. Not an abundance of anything, but anything that was sufficient and necessary. I learned early to live simply, thanks to the Depression and how my parents and teachers handled the situation.

Q: You talked about the old schoolhouse over here. What do you remember about it, the teachers and so forth? You just talked about Otto.

RC: I remember Virginia Horton, Mrs. Clayton Horton. (There

was another Virginia Horton. I just wanted to distinguish the two). I knew both of them. She was a very kind person. I enjoyed her. I was afraid she'd get through teaching before I could have her for my teacher, but she managed to stay through those years and a few longer. She used to walk to school. She had to get her exercise. She used to put us out at recess time with the comment, "You're not made of salt or sugar; you won't melt in the rain." [LAUGHTER]

My first schoolteacher was Florence Keith. K-e-i-t-h. Because my neighbor, who recently died, Bertha K-e-e-f-e, was doing her practice teaching under Miss Keith. I remember the confusion I had, because I knew Bertha long before I had her for a schoolteacher. I could call her Bertha outside the school, but I had to call her Miss Keefe in school, and that confused me. Miss Keith was a very creative teacher. She used to like to draw pictures, scenic pictures, that used to be in the room, the room that joined the three rooms. She did a lot of project work, the Eskimos, the Indians. I think I have some books around here that have Kenneth-- no, Fenton Sparrow. She made up stories about the students that were in the school and this became a kind of workbook material.

Q: Did she make up a story about you?

RC: I'm mentioned, but I don't remember what it was. I do remember that the day we graduated she called us all back in from the eighth grade and gave us the material that we had done in first grade, so we could see the progress. She was a brilliant teacher.

Q: Was she a Miss? She never married?

RC: No. She used to live on Nauset Road. She lived with Carrie Holbrook, after Mrs. Holbrook's husband died. Different people around took in the schoolteachers. Perhaps you know the people-- a house called "The Sullivan House"? It belongs to Normand and Beverly Plante. That's the house (on Route 6) that has all the Christmas lights at Christmas time. It looks so very nice. Her aunt was one of my music teachers, Frances Sullivan.

Q: When did you first discover your musical talent?

RC: When I was five.

Q: You mean all of a sudden you wanted to take lessons?

RC: I told my mother I was going to. "Teach me," that's the way it went.

Q: So she was your first music teacher?

RC: Yes, she was my first teacher. And then my second teacher was Zelma Nettle, whom I knew as Selma Nettle until just a few years ago. The priest who married them said, "No, not Selma, it was Zelma." Zelma Nettle Perkins. And I have tried to get in touch with her. One of my tenants who stayed here summers had had her for a voice teacher. Through him I traced out the old teacher's name, that she was living with her sister. I wrote to her, but she was not able to answer. I know she received the letter. I wrote twice, neither came back. So I'm sure she did.

Q: That's too bad. Well, before we leave the schoolhouse, let's talk a little about Otto. One of our favorite people. Everybody's, I think. He was a brilliant teacher, you said.

RC: Yes. After going on, having a couple of degrees, working in other things on the side, I would say he was probably one of the most brilliant teachers I had. He was probably one of the most brilliant teachers I ever met, and to use the term and use it accurately, I would say he was a born genius. He had about ^{two} ~~two~~ years of normal schooling, I guess. I don't think he had any degree.

Q: He was evidently, by his own admission, a good disciplinarian.

RC: He was.

Q: He said he did not spare the ruler on the hand if he thought it necessary.

RC: Quite correct.

Q: Did you ever run afoul of that?

RC: Almost.

Q: What happened?

RC: We had a Town Meeting and I had written a note in my desk. When I had gone home for lunch, people had been in my desk. I had some comment to make about one of the people who was running. I got well lectured for that. I didn't get the strap for it, just a threat.

Q: Town politics must have played a certain amount in your life at home. You had an uncle and a father in the Town Hall?

RC: Yes.

Q: Town meetings were held right here in the old Town Hall?

RC: Not in my days. They were in the small hall in the Eastham Town Hall.

Q: Do you remember going to them?

RC: Yes. We had to go. This was part of our school work. Otto trotted us up there.

Q: What do you remember about them?

RC: The chairs got awfully hard. [LAUGHTER] And one took one's lunch. There would always be two or three predominating people.

Q: Like who?

RC: Matilda Smart. Maurice Moore. Andrew Merrill sometimes. My mind seems to go more to the night before Christmas than it does to the Town Meeting scene. I have to say that so many people came here, interrupted so many meals, that I had enough town politics by the time I had gotten through high school.

Q: You were not going to be a politician! You mentioned high school. I was going to ask you, you went to high school in Orleans?

RC: Yes, I went for two years. Then I received a high school

equivalency certificate from the Department of Education later on.

Q: Then did you go on to study music?

RC: I studied music all my life and still do. But that had been private, except at the music schools in East Brewster. One was founded by Martha Atwood Baker of Wellfleet. Then it was taken over by Katherine Crocker of Brewster, and I went there for about five summers. This was during the War, so it was hit or miss. I picked up with these teachers later on, Jeanne Boylen and Dr. Ilse Huebner^{Huebner} of Austria and Florida, U.S.A.

Q: But you didn't go away to college, you didn't go to a music school?

RC: No, I didn't go away to music school, except I took lessons at the Boston University School of Music for a while, until I ran out of money.

Q: What did you do, commute?

RC: Yes, I went once a week.

Q: On the train?

RC: Yes.

Q: Do you remember the times when the train came in? Sadie [Flint] said that was the social life. Everybody went down to the depot to get the mail.

RC: That's correct. I remember my mother talking about it.

They would end up at the Sullivan House that now is Beverly's. They used to nickname it Sullivan Square from the subway stop in Boston. I was never involved in this. This was before I was born.

Q: Do you remember what were the things that might have divided the Eastham people in Town Meetings, before we leave the subject?

RC: Well, this was a highly Republican community and two or three Democrats would always be on the opposite side of everything. I would say that it was always money matters. This was a town that always lacked money until recently. The people who have come here have reversed the order of things, so the people who are on the top of the ladder are now on the bottom. The houses that are going up are maybe \$120,000.

Q: I know. Even more than that. That's one of the changes that has come about on the Cape. I'm sure that it has been a little bit hard to take. When Route 6 came through, was it considered sort of a blessing?

RC: No. [LAUGHTER]

Q: What was the general feeling?

RC: Well, I was in a situation where it cut into our property, so I'm sure that what I have to say will be biased in that direction. My father had planned to build a cottage colony, so when the road came through, it took the land that he was going to build on and cut it right in half.

Q: Where was this?

RC: Right in back. It's the land that has the unoccupied restaurant on it and the motel.

Q: Was the main road on the same lot there?

RC: Where it is now, but it used to be in front of the house. That was my grandfather's field and cow pasture.

Q: What was the general feeling about the National Seashore coming in?

RC: I don't know as I ever heard too much about that. I was teaching at the Conservatory at that time. I was out of here from 1956 until 1963. I was one of the co-founders of the Conservatory. I went away for two degrees at college, than came back and taught on the faculty. I helped them get organized. So at that point I was not here. So I didn't hear all of it. My own reaction at first was it would liven things and there would be something to do. I was asked the same question by Elliot Richardson. I was over visiting him and he wanted to know what my reactions were to it and so forth.

Q: You knew Elliot Richardson?

RC: Yes. Since I was nineteen. The Richardson family and the Chase families have known each other for three generations.

Q: What about them? Tell us about them.

RC: Well, I can't tell you too much about Elliot. I knew Pierson and George better. George is a gynecologist. Pierson was a neuro-surgeon and I think he is in general practice now. Elliot used to like to paint. That was his hobby. I can remember they had two paintings of the house that was Abbott Knowles', Mr. Merson's house, one done by a Jewish friend of Elliot's and the other was done by Elliot, I believe. One was sunny and one was very, very dark. It was the same house, done the same year, through the eyes of two different people.

Q: Wasn't there a Richardson who owned the house on the Nauset Marsh?

RC: Yes. That was these Richardsons' uncle, their father's brother.

Q: Did you know him?

RC: I think he was over once. He came to pay his taxes at noon-time. [LAUGHTER] I know a Mrs. Richardson, Charlotte, and I don't know whether she was Harry or Wyman's wife, I can't remember. I believe she is still living and comes down to the old farmhouse. She is a very, very nice person, a very nice person.

Q: The Richardsons have sort of died out around here, haven't they? They don't seem to come down as much any more.

RC: Only when they built on, but I think that was George and Becky. That is George's wife. They have several children and they built on for a place for their children to grow up. Other

than that, they come down maybe on holidays. Thanksgiving day the house is generally well lighted, and possibly Labor Day. They come here about twice a year, and they all try to get together as a family reunion, as I understand it.

Q: You don't see them?

RC: I don't see them any more. I receive Christmas cards, things like that, from George and Becky.

Q: Let's pick you up after high school. What did you do then? Where did you go? Did you ever get married?

RC: No.

Q: You never got married? That's too bad. Some girl missed out.
[LAUGHTER]

RC: See, I wanted to go on to college, and I did finally. I majored in-- I had a triple major when I went to college as an undergraduate. I was given two year's credit for my knowledge of music and art, all I had done. I had studied with Mrs. Curtain, number three, who lived in Bert Bennison's house. She was burned to death in the Coconut Grove fire.

Q: You studied music or art?

RC: Art. With her. Yes, she was a fine artist.

Q: So then you decided that music and art would be your lifelong work?

RC: That and music therapy.

Q: What is music therapy?

RC: It is the application of music with a broad background of psychology to the physical and mental problems of people, and now educational and industrial production.

Q: Did you study this in college?

RC: I studied it in a school in Boston, which is no longer there, with one of the founders of the National Association for Music Therapy, Inc. It becomes more and more popular as one approaches the West Coast.

Q: Did you work in that then after you got out of college? What happened after you got your degrees?

RC: I went to the Conservatory. I was with them, I taught on the faculty for seven years.

Q: The Boston Conservatory?

RC: No, the Cape Cod Conservatory. I was with them from '63 to '70. I had taught privately before and then I was encouraged to join the faculty. I went away and got my degrees, Bachelor of Science and Master of Education.

Q: What have you done with your art?

RC: Not much. That was just a hobby.

Q: What organizations did you belong to here in Eastham?

RC: I was secretary of the World War II Plague Committee. I was organist at the Chapel in the Pines and I was president of the Chapel in the Pines.

Q: Were you in World War II?

RC: No, I wasn't.

Q: I was wondering what the Fourth of July was like here. I remember when I was a kid, we had a lot of firecrackers and stuff.

RC: Yes. I tried to avoid the firecrackers. My ears are pretty sensitive. [LAUGHTER] But I remember cap guns and that sort of thing. We would go to see the fireworks they would have at Nauset Beach in Orleans. I would go down with some of the people. Back in my grandfather's day, he always had some kind of party for them out here on the lawn. It was in one of the pictures in here. [Looking through pictures] That was a full house. [LAUGHTER]

Q: It certainly was. Now who is this?

RC: That was one of the Fourth of July guests. They are probably having a clambake.

Q: I was going to say that it looked like a bucket of clams.

RC: He used to take his people way out beyond the Coast Guard Station. Some of them would go down and they would start a fire, seaweed, the rocks and so forth.

Q: A real clambake.

RC: A real clambake, yes.

Q: Before we quit, what kind of social life did you have in high school? Were there parties and proms and things like that?

RC: No. This was during the War. In general it was. I remember more about World War II, because my father and my mother were very interested in doing things to help the youth keep off the streets and so forth, so they helped run dances at the Town Hall. This house was always filled with young people. It was nothing unusual to have twenty in the front room sitting on the floor. I'd be playing the piano and things like that.

Q: Everybody singing?

RC: Yes, sometimes.

Q: When did the big change come, the people coming down? Was that after World War II?

RC: Yes, and just as soon as Route 6 went through. Actually, my thoughts about the future generation are, what would my grandfather be thinking if he were here today, after yesterday's tragedy. [The Challenger explosion]

Q: It was very bad. Well, thank you very much.

RC: You're very welcome.

(END OF TAPE)



Postcard from J. Russel Chase

Looking south, the Old Town Pump is at the end of the street, in the center of the photo. To the left is the Comfort House. To the right is the Perry barn close by, and the Savage house in the distance

Town Pump, Litcham, Mass.



Postcard from J. Russel Chase

Looking toward the north at the old town pump. The building directly over the car is the old town hall.

